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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 004512

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL KDEM IZ

SUBJECT: FADILA PARTY MAKES ABORTIVE ATTEMPT TO RUN ON ITS OWN

REF: BAGHDAD 4481

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DAVID M. SATTERFIELD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Fadila Party approached the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) November 2 in an effort to break with the Shia Islamist United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) coalition. After the Commissioners declined the request, a Fadila Party spokesman announced that his party would remain an unwilling member of the UIA. IECI's international electoral advisors noted that granting Fadila's request would likely lead to a delay in the December 15 election due to the ballot production timeline.
END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Five days after the coalition and candidate list registration deadline, Fadila Party Spokesman Hassan al-Shamari met with IECI Commissioners to request permission for his party to break with the Shia Islamist UIA coalition and run on its own. According to the IECI's international advisors, the Commissioners unanimously replied that they could not grant an exception to the October 28 deadline for coalition and candidate registration. The Commissioners reportedly told Shamari that he was welcome to resubmit his request in writing. However, the Commissioners subsequently told international electoral advisors that they had made this suggestion out of politeness, with no intention of reconsidering their position. (NOTE: The Commissioners appear to have relied on section 4.7 of IECI regulation number 6, which states, "no political entity may withdraw from a coalition after the period set to present lists of candidates.")

¶3. (C) Upon hearing reports of Fadila's request and the IECI's response, post contacted party members who confirmed their unhappiness with their share of seats on the coalition candidate list. They also claimed unhappiness with public statements by Muqtada al-Sadr distancing himself from the coalition. They said he thereby reneged on an understanding reached during negotiations over the coalition. The Fadila members said they had joined the coalition -- and accepted less than their share of seats in the process -- in order to preserve the unity of the Sadr trend, of which they are a part.

¶4. (C) U.S. and UK Pol and Legal officers also discussed the matter with International Commissioner Jenness and other international electoral advisors. Jenness and his colleagues acknowledged that allowing Fadila to run on its own would be consistent with the principles of electoral pluralism. At the same time, the international team said that the printing process for the ballots is due to start within days and that an IECI decision to grant the Fadila request would almost certainly lead to a delay of the December 15 election.

¶5. (C) At a press conference held after his meeting with the IECI, al-Shamari said that he had concluded that the technical obstacles to a split with the coalition were insurmountable and, as a result, the party "had no choice but to remain part of the Unified Iraqi Coalition's list, but unwillingly."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: In light of Shamari's statement, we do not expect the Fadila Party to press this matter further with the IECI. As of midday November 3, Jenness reported no further contact from the party on this issue. Jenness (protect) said that the combination of a written request from the Fadila leadership and public support from senior politicians might break the unanimity of the Commission's opposition to the Fadila request. However, he told us that he had pressed his staff on the ballot production timeline and was confident that allowing Fadila to run alone at this late stage would result in a delayed election. Assuming that Fadila remains with the other Shia Islamist parties, this episode reaffirms our view that the UIA will remain a fractious alliance, and likely become even more so after the

December election. END COMMENT.

Satterfield